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Abstract:

'Gleam' and 'dream': the rhyme performs a quintessential Romantic pairing and serves as a window opening on to the topic of rhyme in poetry of the period, not least through the serendipitous way in which it off-rhymes with the word 'rhyme' itself. Rhyme is a matter of spanning or failing to span abysses in Romantic poetry as much as it is an earnest of some ultimate harmony or fulfilment. The word 'gleam' suggests an intimations-inducing flash of light; 'dream', for its part, points towards a possibly insubstantial source or vehicle of embodiment or quest or longing. On the face of it, the coupling may seem as hackneyed as any scorners of Romantic verbal effects might wish. Yet Romantic poetry generates an 'electric life', in Shelley's words in *A Defence of Poetry*, from this and comparable verbal interknittings. The essay pays particular attention to the rhyme of 'gleam' and 'dream' in various poems, and then to rhyme's intratextual and intertextual effects in poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge; it returns at its close to themes of aspiration and affirmation often resonating through Romantic rhyme.

## Gleams and Dreams: Reflections on Romantic Rhyme

Michael O'Neill

### I

‘Gleam’ and ‘dream’: the rhyme performs a quintessential Romantic pairing and serves as a window opening on to the topic of rhyme in poetry of the period, not least through the serendipitous way in which it off-rhymes with the word ‘rhyme’ itself. Rhyme is a matter of spanning or failing to span abysses in Romantic poetry as much as it is an earnest of some ultimate harmony or fulfilment. The word ‘gleam’ suggests an intimations-inducing flash of light; ‘dream’, for its part, points towards a possibly insubstantial source or vehicle of embodiment or quest or longing. On the face of it, the coupling may seem as hackneyed as any scorner of Romantic verbal effects might wish. Yet Romantic poetry generates an ‘electric life’, in Shelley’s words in *A Defence of Poetry*, from this and comparable verbal interknittings; rhyme serves the function of ‘awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us’, as Coleridge puts it in *Biographia Literaria*, chapter 14, in a clause whose own sound effects reinforce the redirection of ‘the mind’s attention’.<sup>1</sup>

Shelley mocks and yet exalts the rhyme of ‘dream’ and ‘gleam’ as a Coleridgean trope in *Peter Bell the Third*. Poetry, says Peter’s friend (Coleridge in very thin disguise), is

A power which comes and goes like dream,

And which none can ever trace –  
 Heaven's light on Earth – Truth's brightest beam.'

And when he ceased there lay the gleam  
 Of those words upon his face. (393-7).<sup>2</sup>

There, 'gleam' seems reflexively to mirror the speaker's invocation of 'Truth's brightest beam'. The effect, almost admiringly, is to turn back the effect of the words on the speaker himself, possessor of 'A power which comes and goes like dream'. That the power is 'like dream' rather than 'a dream' gives 'dream' the status of a permanently returning force. The writing is on the sharpest of knife-edges. It is poised between caricature and near-identification. Riding the current of mimicked inspiration, rhyme repeats with generous irony Coleridge's performance as speaker and poet. 'Gleam', we note, is the product of or bears witness to the untraceable presence of 'dream'. The gleam remains; the power that is 'like dream' has come and gone.

'Gleam' appears in rhyming tandem with 'dream' in Coleridge's early 'Sonnet to Robert Southey', the tenth of the 'Sonnets on Eminent Characters'. Again, 'gleam' is the residue of what makes Southey truly 'eminent, his 'sadder strains'. They 'bid in MEM'RY's Dream / The faded forms of past Delight arise; / Then soft, on LOVE's pale cheek, the tearful gleam / Of Pleasure smiles' (10-13).<sup>3</sup> Personifications show unusual energy of implication here; what makes the 'strains' 'sadder' is that they 'bid in MEM'RY's Dream / The faded forms of past Delight arise'. Only, the writing suggests, 'in MEM'RY's Dream' can the desired resurrection take place. The word 'Dream' emerges as an unlocalised habitation where

complex emotion can find a lodging, before longing ratifies itself precariously through the oxymoronic wish-fulfilment implied in Pleasure's 'tearful gleam'.

Shelley appears to respond to Coleridge's effect when in *Adonais* he imagines personifications forming a funeral train, one that anticipates the later succession of living poets said to mourn the dead Adonais. Among the abstractions awakened into poetic life by Keats's death are 'Sorrow, with her family of Sighs, / And Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam / Of her own dying smile instead of eyes'. Both, Shelley writes, 'Came in slow pomp – the moving pomp might seem / Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream' (113-17). 'Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam / Of her own dying smile instead of eyes' recalls the 'tearful gleam / Of Pleasure' that 'smiles'. Both poets associate 'gleam' with a transitory light that speaks of something not wholly lost in the midst of 'Sorrow'. Shelley rhymes 'gleam' with 'seem' (a rhyme Wordsworth uses memorably, as will be discussed later in the essay), as though to point up the highly conscious nature of his elegiac reconstruction, before the final reference to 'an autumnal stream' sends us back gracefully, by way of an allusion to Keats's 'To Autumn', to the physical world from which the younger poet made such fine poetry. Although 'dream' is not used, the passage might embody 'A tear some Dream has loosened from his brain' (86) that one of 'The quick Dreams' has earlier identified. She does not realise that what she thinks of as 'loosened' from the poet's 'brain', living a posthumous existence, is in fact her creation. Shelley's elegy has to come to terms with the fact that it is a poem brought into being by the inability of a fellow-poet to write any more poems, that it has, therefore, a secondary existence and a newly primary one, too, and that it must decide whether life or death is 'a dream'. Later, Shelley keeps Keats alive by arguing that 'He hath awakened from the dream of life' (343).

In 'To the River Otter' (1796), Coleridge also purposefully avoids the rhyme of 'gleam' and 'dream'. One subliminally waits for it after the opening invocation, 'wild streamlet of the west!' (1), but Coleridge refuses to dismiss childhood as a 'dream', though he associates 'Visions of childhood' (12) with the sights which 'Gleamed through thy bright transporence to the gaze!' (11). The medium of poetry and that of memory form a subject-rhyme here, fused into a gleaming 'transporence' through which the past is open 'to the gaze'. 'Visions of childhood!' moves away from this position, pointing up the gap between then and now in the artful ambiguity it shapes: are the 'Visions' past or present? Do the 'Visions' belong to 'childhood', re-entered in the poem? Or are they 'of childhood' seen from an older, adult perspective? Can poetry's devices, among which rhyme is a chief element, overcome temporality? The final line concedes that the fusions glimpsed in the sonnet are a matter of the result of being 'beguiled' in the sadder as well as the more innocent sense of that word, and the poem concludes with a superbly orchestrated line, whose vowel sounds never quite chime, as though playing out, in little, a drama of failed consonance: 'Ah, that once more I were a careless child!' (14).

'Gleam' and 'dream' is a rhyme that Felicia Hemans turned into a Romantic essence, giving it pride of place at the start of 'The Land of Dreams':

Oh spirit land, thou land of dreams!  
 A world thou art of mysterious gleams,  
 Of startling voices, and sounds at strife –  
 A world of the dead in the hues of life! (1-4)

Here, the ‘dreams/gleams’ rhyme may, initially, have a comforting, even deadening ring; but the words begin to ‘startle’ one another, via the appositional run that moves from ‘gleams’ into ‘startling voices, and sounds at strife’. The phrasing suggests that ‘mysterious gleams’ are on inexplicably intimate terms with ‘startling voices, and sounds at strife’. The rhymes performs a twinned function. The first couplet gestures towards the union that is also a mis-marriage; it emerges that realm-crossing hybridity is Hemans’s true subject: ‘A world of the dead in the hues of life’. But the rhyme in the second couplet runs counter to the surface meaning by playing on the circumstance of being a rhyme. It bestows formal harmony, through the fact of its mournfully lilting existence, on ‘sounds at strife’.

W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. helpfully glosses the above-noted effects of conjunction and disjunction when he comments that ‘Rhyme is commonly recognized as a binder in verse structure. But where there is need for binding there must be some difference or separation between the things to be bound’. The insight holds true of Romantic poets, as of Pope, Wimsatt’s subject.<sup>4</sup> ‘Rhyme might also be said’, writes Seamus Perry, ‘to balance the claims of oneness (two words sharing the one sound) and diversity (they must be different words)’, and the way in which that balance is put under expressive strain is among the achievements of Romantic poetry.<sup>5</sup> In ‘The Spirit’s Mysteries’ Hemans balances the claims of ‘oneness’ and ‘diversity’. Her use of the rhyme works, in Coleridge’s phrase, ‘to desynonomize’ ‘dreams’ and ‘gleams’.<sup>6</sup> Allowing for their consanguinity, she relates them as co-helpers in the same restless spiritual labour, referring to ‘the far wanderings of the soul in dreams, / Calling up shrouded faces from the dead, / And with them bringing soft or solemn gleams, / Familiar objects brightly to o’erspread’ (19-22): ‘dreams’ are the questing impulse, animated by

unbidden forces; ‘gleams’ the consequent imaginative reward, involving the capacity to re-illuminate ‘Familiar objects’.

‘Gleams’ thus [delete ‘thus?'] unmask or remove what Coleridge, describing Wordsworth’s contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*, refers to as ‘the film of familiarity’ (Wu, p. 692).

Wordsworth himself looks to ‘seem’ as the companion-word for ‘dream’ in a number of places, as when in ‘Resolution and Independence’ he returns to his sense of the old man’s strangeness, the stanza’s triple *b* rhyme issuing in this couplet: ‘And the whole body of the man did seem / Like one whom I had met with in a dream’ (116-17). That this couplet clinches the sound-patterning set off by the line, ‘But now his voice to me was like a stream’ (114), allows it to participate in the ‘streaming’ effect discussed by Thomas McFarland.<sup>7</sup> The couplet’s rhyme conveys the uncanny resemblance between an internal mental event and the old man’s mode of being, and the wording’s hints of an ulterior pastness (‘did seem’, ‘had met with’) surround the immediate pastness of the encounter with a further dimension of internalised reflection.

Seeming and dreaming is a pairing that questions the nature both of existence and of poetic perception. Wordsworth’s use of the ‘gleam’ and ‘dream’ rhyme incorporates this questioning within a wider framework, one concerned with the visionary, at the close of stanza 4 of ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’: ‘Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?’ (56-7). For all the elegiac colouring here, the rhyme leaves a door enticingly ajar between a gleam having fled and a dream having hidden; we thought from the opening that ‘The glory and the freshness of a dream’ (5) could be safely if sadly consigned to a past saluted by the opening’s ‘There was a time’ (1). But that ‘now’, a



revision from 'gone', opens up the poem to thinking about the larger rhythms and rhyming that govern our destiny.<sup>8</sup> The start of the poem's ninth stanza offers a struggling answer to stanza 4's questions: 'O joy! that in our embers / Is something that doth live, / That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive' (132-5). If rhyme enforces a distance, it also forges a connection: 'remembers' fans the remnants of fire in 'embers'; 'fugitive' marks the elusive reality of the 'something that doth live'.

The 'Ode' uses rhyme to suggest links and the difficulty of making links. We may have 'come / From God, who is our home' (65-6), but any apparent triteness in that short-lined couplet disappears as the 'musically interlaced' rhymes (Hopkins's phrase and praise) imply a difficult melody, one emerging from a barely formulable search, in subsequent lines and stanzas.<sup>9</sup> Partly explaining the power of the lines just quoted from the start of stanza 9 is the passage preceding it: 'Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight, / And custom lie upon thee with a weight / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life' (129-31). The word 'live' (133) turns deadened noun ('life') into resurrected verb, challenging the 'earthly freight' besetting the soul, itself enacted through the rhyme with custom's 'weight', a heaviness reinforced by the stress-shift on 'Heavy'. The rhyme of 'live' and 'fugitive' allows creative memory to live again by sensing and capitalising on the shred of hope offered by the internal off-rhyme's hint in 'frost' and 'almost'.

The off-rhyme intimates that, though frost almost has the final word, it does not fully have it/not have it fully. It does not have it for powerful, not wholly definable reasons. In the ninth stanza, the rhyming attunes itself to the murky psychological stuff on which Wordsworth draws, as he places his trust on/in? 'obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things, /

Fallings from us, vanishings' (144-6). Anything sportively dancing falls and vanishes from this triplet, the effect of words ending in 'ing', mysterious gerundival processes, queuing up to be both object and partners of 'obstinate questionings'.

## II

The 'Ode' illustrates how rhyme serves intratextual and intertextual ends in Romantic poetry. Words in a Romantic poem take on a significance which only a particular poem can confer. An example of intratextual reference involving rhyme occurs in the use of the just-examined word 'live'. As noted, the verb plays a pivotal role in the recovery begun at the start of stanza 9, and it is no accident that the word reappears, yet takes on a steadier resilience, at the close of the poem:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (203-6)

Earlier, 'live' helped blow joy's embers into flame. Here, a more inclusive scope is established; 'live' is what 'we' all do by virtue of 'the human heart', a heart that incorporates a full range of feeling, as a result of which an ordinary flower 'can give' 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'. The final quatrain moves away from an enfolding rhyming structure (present in the previous four lines). Rhyme, now, takes on an alternating form. In

the act of arriving at a resolving of its questions and intimations, the 'Ode' reminds us that the pendulum of feelings, gifts, thoughts and tears continues to swing.

Wordsworth redeems for a complicatedly positive purpose a rhyme which in Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' is almost sardonically at cross-purposes. The bestowing and lending with which 'Ode. Intimations of Immortality' concludes are conveyed through the rhyme of 'live' and 'give'. Here, the 'Ode' responds to Coleridge's poem whose first stanza ends with the hope that the 'sounds' (17) of the coming storm 'Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give, / Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!' (19-20). Rhyme, in this context, marks literariness in an affecting way; this literariness is at the service of an imagination that feels it does not work anymore. In fact, nothing gives wonted impulses and nothing lives imaginatively. As a result, Coleridge writes, 'It were a vain endeavour, / Though I should gaze for ever / On that green light that lingers in the west' (42-4).

That rhyme of 'endeavour' and 'for ever' appeals to Romantic poets for its intimations of something evermore about to be, quest, and pursuit. But Coleridge makes it assume an air of futility; Wordsworth seeks to rebuke that sense of futility, which is registered, only to be overborne, in the 'Ode', as he appeals to 'truths that wake / To perish never, / Which neither listlessness nor mad endeavour, / Nor man nor boy, / Nor all that is at enmity with joy / Can utterly abolish or destroy' (158-63). In this example of an intertextual counterpoint scored by rhyme, Wordsworth begins with the negative form of 'ever' ('never'), placing it as a proleptic defence against the pell-mell rush of 'mad endeavour'.

Shelley, in his 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', also reworks the rhyme at the start of his sceptical third stanza:

No voice from some sublime world hath ever  
 To sage or poet these responses given;  
 Therefore the name of God, and ghosts, and heaven  
 Remain the records of their vain endeavour... (25-8)

But 'vain endeavour' is the folly of others. Shelley's poetic effort will seek to avoid being a 'vain endeavour' precisely by reminding itself that it is an endeavour shaped by imaginative dreams and gleams. The endeavour is a form of receptivity to a force which the poet prays will affect the life of 'one who worships thee, / And every form containing thee' (81-2): 'thee', repeated in the rhyme position, stresses the reaching out to the significant other (Intellectual Beauty) that is also part of the self.

Shelley's longing for 'harmony' (74) consciously overplays its hand. Rhyme in Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' allows the reader to glimpse the harmony from which the poet is cut off. In a return to the 'give/live' rhyme, Coleridge co-opts chiming sound as a means of mirroring the relationship between 'nature' and 'our life alone': 'Oh Lady, we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does nature live; / Our is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud' (47-9). The lines fantasise about imagination's marriage with reality, presenting the self as the wooer who makes all possible, and offering a miniature mock-Gothic drama of failed desire, the 'wedding-garment' turning into a 'shroud'. This duality informs the passage that

follows in which Coleridge sustains two rhymes for six lines, almost as though choreographing a debate.

And would we aught behold of higher worth  
 Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
 To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd –  
 Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
 Enveloping the earth! (50-55)

The shroud links itself to the ‘poor loveless ever-anxious crowd’; the ‘higher worth’ attaches itself to the light from the soul itself that must ‘issue forth’. That second set of rhymes strains to gain the upper hand in the section, feeling its way forward into the ‘fair luminous cloud / Enveloping the earth!’ It wins a victory when it champions the need for a soul-begotten ‘sweet and potent voice, of its own birth’ (57). Yet the victory is virtual, Pyrrhic; in a later section, the same rhymes return but bear a different burden: ‘But now afflictions bow me down to earth’ (82). There is no new birth now, only a suspension of what ‘nature gave me at my birth – / My shaping spirit of imagination’ (85-6). The shaping spirit, we may feel, is despairingly aware of itself as spinning a rhyme on a word that is now just a word, ‘imagination’, not an active faculty. Indeed, the feminine rhyme of ‘imagination’ and ‘visitation’ (84) sounds, for a misleading moment, like a discovery, before the discovery is made that there is no discovery.

Rhyme is often the poetic currency for conflicted bargaining about poetry's dreams and gleams between Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1802. One pair appears, first, in Wordsworth's 'Ode': 'To me alone there came a thought of grief' (22) he recalls, asserting straightaway and with expressive lack of, or over-asserted, conviction: 'A timely utterance gave that thought relief / And I again am strong' (23-4). This strength soon weakens as the grief which found relief returns to burden the poem. The 'Ode' will travel a long way before it states, in a repetition which forms a considered return, that 'We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind' (182-3). Coleridge finds a sardonic relief in the idea that grief can find no relief when he replays this rhyme in 'Dejection: An Ode' (and its earlier version, 'A Letter to -----').<sup>10</sup> As though fascinated by Wordsworth's rhyme, he broods at the start of his second stanza on the word 'grief': 'A grief without a pang – void, dark, and drear, / A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief / Which finds no natural outlet, no relief / In word, or sigh, or tear' (21-4). The possibility of 'relief' runs into the sands; without a main verb, the lines form a pangless, stagnant circuit. Relief of a kind comes quickly. Coleridge strains beyond circularity to describe what he sees with an acuity at once precise and, in the poem's own word, 'heartless' (25), lacking in heart. As Paul Magnuson notes, the echo's initial negation of Wordsworthian 'relief' serves as 'a prelude to a temporary relief through the utterance of a blessing'. The rhyme suggests the ambivalent blessing bestowed by poetic art: that it permits imagining of the interplay between experience and representation.<sup>11</sup>

Coleridge may have derived the word 'Dejection' for his revised version of 'A Letter to ----' from Wordsworth's response to the 'Letter' to Sara Hutchinson in 'The Leech-Gatherer', in which Wordsworth writes 'As high as we have mounted in delight / In our dejection do we sink as low' (24-5, quoted from the poem's later incarnation as 'Resolution and

Independence’).<sup>12</sup> It is a word that forms a subject-rhyme, by antithesis, with ‘joy’ in Coleridge’s poem and with ‘delight’ in the just-quoted lines from Wordsworth, but it refuses any easy sound partner, standing alone, dejectedly, as (?) a disconsolate singleton. Rhyme puts itself under pressure in both Coleridge’s ‘Letter’ and Wordsworth’s ‘Resolution and Independence’. In both poems feminine rhyme betrays a sense of awkwardness and incongruity. Coleridge writes of the domestic bliss he imagines prevailing in Wordsworth’s household: ‘While ye are well and happy, ’twould but wrong you, / If I should fondly yearn to be among you’ (165-6).<sup>13</sup> In places Wordsworth takes rhyme to the brink of banality and beyond: ‘My question eagerly did I renew, / “How is it that you live, and what is it you do”?’ (125-6); there, the monosyllables plod and dodder, almost gleefully sending up the speaker’s dithering inability to know anything, and yet honouring his and the old man’s defiant resilience. Rhyme reminds us of local conjunctions and larger disjunctions, since the dominant *b* rhyme in the stanza has taken its cue from the line, ‘The hope that is unwilling to be fed’ (121).

Wordsworth pulls himself together, by retreating from the visionary intensity of the stanza’s opening five lines and shifting into another mode, one in which darker imaginings are shown to be and shown up as merely imagined. Imagination finds its way forward by denying its more nightmarish promptings, yet without those promptings the contrapuntal movement in the direction of pragmatic stoicism (ushered in by the final couplet) would not happen.<sup>14</sup> The word ‘renew’, a key cue, points up a near-redemptive function for rhyme; the verb sponsors the possibility of acting, of being able to ‘do’ something. Later, in a reprise of the stanza, and a tribute to rhyme’s way of making poems circle back as well as progress forwards, the rhyme is decisively ‘renewed’: ‘While I these thoughts within myself pursued, / He, having

made a pause, the same discourse renewed' (139-40). This time the old man does the 'renewing', and it is the speaker's ability to take the lead from him rather than from his own haunted troublings (see 135) that, paradoxically, allows a space for and gives value to such troublings.<sup>15</sup>

### III

Rhymes going slightly awry on purpose are a feature of Wordsworthian poetry at its most daring. Suh awryness often goes hand hand-in-hand with the poetry's rhythmic effects, as Brennan O'Donnell points out. Of the quatrain in 'Expostulation and Reply', 'Nor less I deem that there are powers / Which of themselves our minds impress / That we can feed this mind of ours, / In a wise passiveness' (21-4), O'Donnell comments that 'the syllable that ends the stanza is unsettling because it is inadequate to the expectation of an equal-stressed rhyme', thus bringing out the force of impressing and impressive powers, and the necessarily unforceful nature of a 'wise passiveness'.<sup>16</sup> 'Passiveness' falls away, not so much clinching the rhyme with 'impress' as allowing itself to register the force of that impression.

The Romantics were alert to the discomforts as well as comforts conveyed by rhyme. In 'The Thorn' Wordsworth's stanza form plays on lack and return of rhyme: each stanza is eleven lines long, rhyming *abcbdeffegg*: out of the first five lines in each stanza only two rhyme before there is a return to rhyme in the last six lines, an enclosed quatrain, *effe*, followed by a couplet, *gg*.<sup>17</sup> The effects are various: but one might characterise a central consequence as making the reader aware of the speaker's attempt to pull details into a surmised, never quite clinched design, much as he can never quite bring himself to articulate his strong suspicion



that there is a connection between the thorn, the grief of Martha Ray, and the death of an infant. Even the notorious couplet, 'I've measured it from side to side; / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide' (32-3), starts to look less risible when one sees this impulse asserting itself. Throughout, an anxious mind (compounded out of the obsessive speaker and narrating poet) doggedly seeks out pattern.

The poem almost mocks the conferral of meaning made possible by poetic form, rhyme keeping dodgy company with superstitious belief. Yet in possibly the nearest thing to a climactic stanza, rhyme as superstitious or gossipy guesswork gives way to rhyme as heartbeat-skipping discovery:

'Twas mist and rain, and storm and rain,  
 No screen, no fence could I discover;  
 And then the wind – in faith, it was  
 A wind full ten times over!  
 I looked around, I thought I saw  
 A jutting crag, and off I ran  
 Head-foremost through the driving rain,  
 The shelter of the crag to gain;  
 And, as I am a man,  
 Instead of jutting crag, I found  
 A woman seated on the ground. (188-98)

The lack of 'screen' or 'fence' and the sparse rhyme at the start mirror one another; 'discover', first of all, finds nothing, just 'A wind full ten times over'. Then 'I thought I saw' runs aground, yet the search for shelter takes the poem into the exposed alterity of 'A woman seated on the ground'. Rhyme is less shelter than a jolt of encounter. Yet no secret is wholly explained, even though we feel close to the unaccommodated thing itself, and the poem leaves us with the refrain-like, self-enclosed cry of the woman: 'Oh misery! Oh misery! / Oh woe is me! Oh misery!' (252-3), repeated from stanzas 6 and 7.<sup>18</sup>

It is the fate of knowing to meet with obstructions in Wordsworth's and other Romantic poets' rhymes. Possibly the most pointed example of this occurs in 'She dwelt among th'untrodden ways'. In the closing stanza, the poem's enigmas rush for answerable speech towards the void or plenitude of an exclamation: 'She lived unknown, and few could know / When Lucy ceased to be; / But she is in her grave, and oh / The difference to me!' (9-12). The word 'know' is already wavering, losing its foothold in the first line; rhymed with 'oh', its pretensions fly apart as Wordsworth takes lyric to a point of disintegration, marked by a phoneme of distress or distressed wonder or wondering distress.

But the urge to marry 'gleams' and 'dreams' is never absent from Romantic poetry, even when that marriage takes the imagination into a state of virtual suspension, as in Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle', with its sighting of 'the gleam, / The light that never was, on sea or land, / The consecration, and the poet's dream' (14-16). Hints of illusoriness, in 'the light that never was', pass into a re-dedication to the 'The consecration, and the poet's dream', even if other disciplines lie in wait such as 'the new control' resulting from the fact that 'A deep distress hath humanized my soul' (36).

Wordsworth's re-employment in 'Elegiac Stanzas' of the 'gleam/dream' rhyme reminds us that, for the Romantics, rhyme, like poetry itself, in Shelley's account, 'subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things' (Wu, p. 1196). But it allows those 'irreconcilable things' to assert their presence. As a mode of attempted celebration, it serves, too, as an emblem of poetry's ability to make at least verbal things happen. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan: A Vision' (the 1816 title) embodies this capacity in its title, the second word of which is pronounced 'Can', 'if', as Seamus Perry notes, 'an entry in Dorothy's journal ...is a joke about a water-can'.<sup>19</sup> Yet as the 'caverns measureless to man' (14; qtd from 1816 text) run away from Kubla's name across rhymed enjambments, the reader wonders whether powerlessness, too, is intimated. Rhyme is crucial to the poem's imaginings: swaying in accord with the 'mingled measure' (33) that accompanies the 'shadow of the dome of pleasure' (31), and clinching delight in a 'miracle of rare device' (34) with the miraculous, druggy vision of 'A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice' (35). When the poet imagines rebuilding the 'dome in air' (46), rhyme climbs a ladder of affirmation, and yet reminds us of the conditionality of the rungs which make up that ladder:

...I would build that dome in air,  
 That sunny dome, those caves of ice!  
 All who heard should see them there,  
 And all should cry 'Beware, beware!  
 His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
 Weave a circle round him thrice,  
 And close your eyes with holy dread –

For he on honey-dew hath fed  
And drank the milk of paradise'. (46-54)

The nine lines use three rhymes, weave a circle round themselves thrice, one is tempted to say, except that the 'air' rhyme, repeated four times, carries the motif of longing as it strains after a 'there', hearing further voices, not 'prophesying war' (30), but, with a slight alteration of sound, crying 'Beware, beware!' The other two rhymes try to bring longing into controlled shape, concluding the poem by describing an *abba* circle and linking the image of miracle – 'caves of ice' – with further hints of magic and paradisal inspiration. The original preference for 'drank' in the Crewe manuscript and 1816 printing rather than 'drunk', the 1834 reading, suggests a wish to return to the syllable of power sounded out in 'Khan' (or 'Can'). 'And drank the milk of paradise' puts the 'would' and 'should' of earlier lines into abeyance, even as the ghost of something desired not attained haunts the lines. Rhymes can rearrange the world, but their ability fundamentally to change it is a matter of scrutiny in Romantic poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley and Coleridge are cited, as is all primary material from the Romantic period, where possible, from *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, 3rd edn (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 1191, 692.

<sup>2</sup> *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (2003; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 rev).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16: Poetical Works I: Poems (Reading Text): Part 1*, ed. J.C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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<sup>4</sup> W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., 'One Relation of Rhyme to Reason: Alexander Pope', *Modern Language Quarterly* 5. 3 (1944): 323-38 (335).

<sup>5</sup> Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 4, in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 417.

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas McFarland, *William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 'the idea of flow is ... intrinsic to ... the infrashape of the longer Romantic lyric', p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> See *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared R. Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 378-9.

<sup>9</sup> *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ii. *Correspondence 1882-1889*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 822.

<sup>10</sup> For a text of the earlier version, see *Coleridge's 'Dejection': The Earliest Manuscripts and the Earliest Printings*, ed. Stephen Maxfield Parrish (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> See Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 293.

<sup>12</sup> See *Coleridge's 'Dejection'*, ed. Parrish, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> 'A Letter to -----', Cornell Manuscript, Reading Text, qtd from *Coleridge's 'Dejection'*, ed. Parrish.

<sup>14</sup> Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* finds the poem guilty of 'incongruity', but rhyme is among the means by which that 'incongruity' is turned to expressive effect, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Halmi et al. p. 526. See the absorbing discussion in Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, pp. 274-80.

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<sup>15</sup> Here I am in agreement with Richard Gravil's view that 'one can have it both ways' in thinking that 'what triumphs' is both 'the poet's transformative imagination' and 'the leech-gatherer's habit of cheerfully popping up', *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation*, 2nd edn. rev. and enlarged (Tirril: Humanites-Ebooks, 2015), pp. 225-6n. Gravil's reading is also relevant to this essay because of its emphasis on Wordsworth's search for and finding of, in the hare of the opening as well as the old man himself, 'a companionable form' (p. 223): the poem, that is, thematises the search for counterparts, a fact which one might connect to the impulse to rhyme.

<sup>16</sup> Brennan O'Donnell, *The Passion of Meter: A Study of Wordsworth's Metrical Art* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995), p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> See O'Donnell for a discussion of the poem's 'intricately rhymed, eleven-line structure', a stanza which he compares with Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' and 'Ode on the Spring', p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> See Peter McDonald's comment that 'the primacy of the repetition of Martha Ray's cry remains the poem's most secure fact, and is something in advance of the attempted explanations right to the end', *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 63

<sup>19</sup> See Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, pp. 201-2n, which cites H. M. Margoliouth, *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795-1834* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 49.